



Presumable pre-Viking Age landing site on the western coast of Estonia

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INTRODUCTION

In February 2017 a pre-Viking Age brooch that was said to have been found years ago by Andrus Kärvet in Ullaste village in Hanila municipality, Läänemaa County, was brought to the attention of archaeologists (Figs 1–2). According to the finder he discovered the brooch while working in his garden: ‘The brooch lay no deeper than 20 cm. It is the ancient seabed there, and loam comes to surface sporadically.’ Archaeological survey of the site of discovery, directed by the author of the present paper, took place on 24 March 2017 (Kiudsoo 2017).

DESCRIPTION, DATING AND ORIGIN OF THE BROOCH

The surface of the flat brooch found in Ullaste is decorated with four stylized animal figures forming a swastika; the rim bears plaited ornament. The state of preservation of the artefact, cast of bronze and gilded (?) is nearly ideal, regardless of the missing pin, which most likely was made of iron (Figs 3–5).

The Ullaste brooch belongs to the type called round brooches or disc brooches, which later developed into the so-called box-shaped brooch (Swedish *dosspänne*), widely worn on the island of Gotland in the Viking Age (Thedéen 2012, 66). Such pre-Viking Age ornaments are practically unknown on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. The only

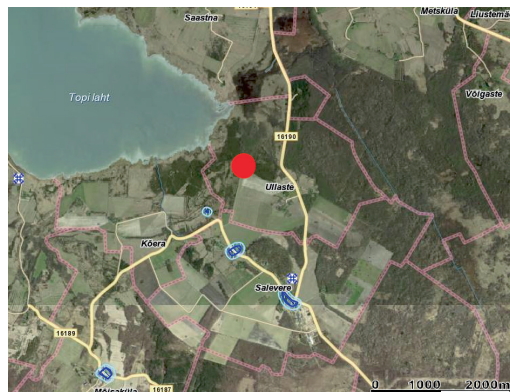


Fig. 1. The findspot of the brooch on the distribution map of cultural monuments.

Jn 1. Sõle leiukoht kultuurimälestiste levikukaardil.
Map / Kaart: Map server of the Land Board / Maa-ameti kaardiserver



Fig. 2. Surroundings of the findspot of the Ullaste brooch.
Jn 2. Ullaste sõle leiukoha lähimbrus.

Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo



Fig. 3. The surface of the Ullaste brooch is decorated with four stylized animal figures.

Jn 3. Ullaste sõle pealispinda katab loomornament.

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Fig. 4. Bottom view of the Ullaste brooch.

Jn 4. Ullaste sõlg altvaates.

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Fig. 5. Ornament on the margin of the brooch.

Jn 5. Sõle serva ornament.

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exception is Grobiņa and its surroundings in Courland (Gunnarsson 2012), but the specimens found there have been dated to the second half of the Pre-Viking Age, thus having reached the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea about a hundred years later than the Ullaste find. According to its characteristics, the Ullaste item clearly belongs to the beginning of the pre-Viking Age, and by more recent dating specifying the typology of Birger Nerman (1969), dates from the period 550–600 AD (type I2) (Rundkvist 2003, 61 and references; Gunnarsson 2012, 23 and references). By its appearance and workmanship, the Ullaste brooch is one of the most beautiful of the known specimens.

LANDING SITE?

The preliminary investigations carried out at the finding-place of the Ullaste brooch, as well as the appearance of the ornament, suggested that the situation may be analogous to the Klooga finds of 2009/2010 (Kiudsoo 2016, 99–100), i.e. the object may have fallen into coastal water during the dragging of a boat. The original hypothesis was confirmed by the analysis of historic maps, as well as the feedback from geoecologist Reimo Rivis from Tallinn University. Collating the location where A. Kärvet discovered the brooch, and the coastline about 1400 years ago, it appeared that they coincided perfectly.

Landing sites, where boats were pulled ashore, have existed since the time humans started to use watercraft. The identification of such places is extremely complicated. Because of the impact of waves, ice, and wind, traces of human activity usually disappear very quickly on the coast. The discovery of ancient coastlines and landing places is

further complicated by the fact that due to land uplift, many of these places are now inland (Tvauri 2012, 214). Actually we know very little about Estonian prehistoric harbour sites and/or landing places. Maritime landscapes on prehistoric and medieval Saaremaa have been the subject of Marika Mägi's research (Mägi 2004; 2005; 2007a, etc.). In addition, what are thought to be landing places or harbour sites have been identified on the northern coast of Estonia at Tsitre not far from the hill fort at Muuksi. Based on the rate of uplift and the recovered

pottery, the presumed landing place at Tsitre has been dated to the Migration Period (Vedru 2006). M. Mägi has also supposed that the cultural layer discovered on a terrace at the western foot of Iru hill fort, between the hill and the Pirita River, represents a former harbour site (Mägi 2007b, 33–35). However, this interpretation is somewhat implausible (see Tvauri 2012, 242). So far, the only archaeologically recorded Viking Age landing site on Estonian mainland has been found near Klooga, Harjumaa County (see Kiudsoo & Russow 2011, 229; Kiudsoo & Kallis 2013, 34–35; Kiudsoo 2016, 99–100).

REGIONAL AND TEMPORAL BACKGROUNDS

The dominant landscape element of the finding site of the brooch, presently located about 0.5 km from the shore, is a limestone bluff – Salumägi of Saluvere – rising 24 m from sea level. The archaeological complex there has been investigated by Helena Kaldre (Kaldre *et al.* 2009; Kaldre 2012).

As for the production date of the Ullaste brooch (second half of the 6th century), very few archaeological sites and even single artefacts dated to the period are known from whole Estonia. The nearest sites, related to the Matsalu Bay (Lihula, Pajumaa) are nevertheless located only about 15 km as the crow flies from Ullaste. A fragment of a gilt silver mount of Scandinavian origin, of the same date or even earlier than the discussed brooch, was found during the excavation of the Lihula grave (5th–6th (7th) century) in 1974. A pre-Viking Age cremation burial was assumed, on the basis of the finds of bronze and iron buckles of the 5th–6th century, also in the grave of Pajumaa. In the context of Läänemaa the Varetimägi of Ehmja should also be mentioned, where two sets of metal details of bridles were found. Relying on the basis of analogies from Gotland, these have been dated to the same period as the Ullaste brooch, i.e. to 550–600 AD (Mandel 2003, 27–30, 95, 301).

Written sources reveal that in AD 536/537 a climate catastrophe took place in the northern hemisphere, which was expressed in the darkening of sunlight and the significant cooling of air temperature. It has not yet been possible to determine what caused the event, but it is presumed to have been an immense volcanic eruption or a comet striking or passing very near Earth (Tvauri 2012, 36 and references). Archaeological and palynological data reveal that this event caused crop failure and demographic catastrophe in what is today Estonia. It took until at least the end of the 9th century to return to the previous population level (Tvauri 2014, 39). The crisis in the 6th century is observable in several neighbouring regions, for instance in the archaeological record in Sweden. In Gotland and Öland great settlement loss has been archaeologically recorded, even the emigration of the population has been supposed (Tvauri 2012, 310 and references; Tvauri 2014, 37). The mythical events described in the Guta saga have been dated to about the year 500. In accordance with this account, Gotland was unable to feed its inhabitants, and a third of the island's population emigrated. The emigrants headed at first to the island of Hiiumaa in Estonia (Tvauri 2012, 29 and references).

CONCLUSION

The Ullaste brooch is unique among the archaeological finds from Estonia. Its finding place most likely suggests a pre-Viking Age landing site or even a harbour site. At the present state of investigations, we cannot yet answer the question whether this brooch and other single imported artefacts of that time, found around Matsalu Bay, mark just trade contacts between Scandinavians and inhabitants of Läänemaa, or whether they are connected with the possible emigration from Gotland.

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OLETATAV EELVIKINGIAEGNE RANDUMISKOHT EESTI LÄÄNERANNIKUL

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2017. a veebruaris jõudis Eesti arheoloogiateaduse vaatevälja aastaid tagasi Läänemaalet Hanila val- last Ullaste külast (jn 1–2) aiaaard kaevates leitud unikaalne sõlg. Selle, Gotlandi saarel ajavahemikus 550–600 pKr valmistatud lameda sõle pealispinnal on kujutatud nelja stiliseeritud looma, mis moodustavad svastika. Sõle serv on kaunistatud palmikmustri- ga (jn 3–5). Algselt tõenäoliselt kullatud pronksehte säili- vus on ideaalilähedane, kui mitte arvestada puuduvat nõela, mis oli ilmselt tehtud rauast.

Ullaste sõlg kujutab endast Gotlandil viikingiajal massiliselt kantud nn karpisõle eelkäijat. Analoo- gseid eelviikingiaegseid ehteid Läänemere idakaldalt mujalt praktiliselt ei teatagi, ainsaks erandiks on Grobiņa koloonia ja selle lähiumbrus Kuramaal, kust avastatud eksemplarid pärinevad eelviikingiaja tei- sest pooltest.

Mis puudutab Ullaste sõle valmistamisaega (6. saj teine pool), siis Eestist on selle perioodi muistiseid ja isegi üksikuid esemeid väga vähe teada. Tollal aset leidnud kultuurikatkestus on olnud arvatavasti otseselt seotud põhjapoolkeral 536/537. aastal toimu-

nud suure kliimakatastroofiga, mis avaldus päikese- valguse tuhmumises ja õhutemperatuuri olulises jähinemises.

Nii sõle avastamiskohas toimunud eeluuringud kui ka ehte välisilme osutavad, et tegemist võib olla 2009/2010. aasta Klooga leidudele analoogse situat- siooniga, st et ese kukkus laeva/paadi lohistamisel rannikulähedasse vette. Algset tööhüpoteesi kinni- tas lisaks ajaloolise aja kaardimaterjali analüüsile ka Tallinna Ülikooli geoökoloog Reimo Rivisel saadud tagasiside. Asetades Ullaste sõle leiukoha u 1400 aasta tagusele merepiirile, selgus, et u 600 pKr eksis- teerinud rannajoon paikneski “täpselt” seal, kust ehe leiti.

Küsimusele, kas Ullaste sõlg ja teised Matsalu lahe ümbrusest avastatud üksikud 6. sajandi teise poole importesemed markeerivad pelgalt skandinaavlaste ja läänlaste vahelisi kaubakontakte või osutavad Põhjala saagades mainitud u 6. saj alguspoolle toimunud oja- maalaste väljarände, ei ole praeguse uurimisseisu juures veel võimalik vastust anda.